United Nations S/2016/298

Security Council

Distr.: General
31 March 2016
English
Original: Russian

# Letter dated 31 March 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith information on the smuggling of antiquities by the international terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Churkin**

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## Annex to the letter dated 31 March 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

## Smuggling of antiquities by the international terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

Around 100,000 cultural objects of global importance, including 4,500 archaeological sites, nine of which are included in the World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), are under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq. The profit derived by the Islamists from the illicit trade in antiquities and archaeological treasures is estimated at US$ 150-200 million per year.

Within ISIL, the smuggling of artefacts is organized by the antiquities division (commander: Abu Sayyaf al-Iraqi), which is part of the so-called ministry for control of natural resources within the group's "government". Only individuals in possession of a written permit stamped by this "department" are permitted by the Islamists to carry out excavations and to remove and transport excavated items.

Antiquities from Syria and Iraq are exported by the extremists mostly through the territory of Turkey. The main centre for the smuggling of cultural heritage items is the Turkish city of Gaziantep, where the stolen goods are sold at illegal auctions and then through a network of antique shops and at the local market, Bakırcılar Çarşısi (Eski Saray Street, Şekeroğlu district).

It has been observed that new offices for the purchase of antiquities have opened on the Turkish-Syrian border in the administrative district of Akçakale (640 km south-east of Ankara, Şanlıurfa Province). Ismet Eren, the owner of an antique shop at 24 Karanfil Street in the town of Kilis, is involved in the illicit trade. Bulky goods are delivered by the Turkish transport companies Şenocak Nakliyat, Devran Nakliyat, Karahan Nakliyat and Egemen Nakliyat. Smuggled artefacts (jewellery, coins, etc.) then arrive in the Turkish cities of Izmir, Mersin and Antalya, where representatives of international criminal groups produce fake documents on the origin of the antiquities.

The antiquities are then offered to collectors from various countries, generally through Internet auction sites such as eBay and specialized online stores (vauctions.com, ancients.info, vcoins.com, trocadero.com and auctionata.com). The sites osmanlielsanatlari.com, kaynarcopper.com and ertasantik.com are also used to find buyers. The criminals employ concealment measures, such as IP-address spoofing, which makes it difficult to identify and determine the actual location of the seller. Recently ISIL has been exploiting the potential of social media more and more frequently so as to cut out the middleman and sell artefacts directly to buyers. Preference is given to cash transactions, while transactions conducted over the Internet involve the same financial institutions as are involved in transactions for the purchase of weapons and ammunition